

Tass on Target, for Once

The Soviet news agency Tass, a favorite source of information for the CIA, has come up with a thought that could be converted into one of the more stimulating proposals of the year. We commend it to our friends at the CIA fortress in McLean, Va. Let us sketch the background.

As part of the current spate of cold war comment in the Soviet press, Tass recently seized upon American newspaper disclosures of CIA spying operations in the United States against United States citizens. "Not so long ago, when the European Security and Co-operation Conference started discussing 'humanitarian problems,' the Western press tried to create the impression that it is the capitalist world that is a bulwark of civil liberties," Tass stated, adding: "And now it is obvious that fundamental rights of citizens are flouted in the leading country of the 'free world.'"

At the risk of having our mail opened, our telephones tapped, our offices broken into and our staff infiltrated, we would like to say that Tass is right on target. The fundamental rights of American citizens have indeed been flouted by an agency that has now admitted doing such things, plus quite a few more. William E. Colby, the CIA director, may try to explain away such violations of the law governing his agency by suggesting that some overstepping of the line is inevitable when one is in the dirty tricks business. However, we prefer the Tass implication that a nation that professes civil liberties should practice civil liberties.

And now to our proposal. We think it would be a splendid idea if the 34-nation Conference on Europe-

an Security and Co-operation would look thoroughly into the way each of its participants adheres to human rights principles. This might delay the grand summit finale that the Kremlin has been promoting for some time. But because the security conference from its inception has been nothing more than a Soviet ploy to legitimize its hold on Eastern Europe, why the rush? Why not force the United States to explain in an international forum how its foreign intelligence agency came to feel it had a right to plant agents among "dissidents" espousing black rights or opposing the Vietnam war? And why not force the Soviet Union to explain a system that works in the depths where government critics are thrown into mental hospitals, exiled from their homes, deprived of their livelihoods and condemned to prison.

Our modest proposal might accomplish three objectives, all of which are in the interest of the Central Intelligence Agency. First, it would delay completion of the European Security Conference, which would be no loss to American diplomacy. Second, it would demonstrate anew that Communists remain far more expert than Western capitalists in the art of violating civil liberties. Third, and more important, it would remind perceptive officials of the CIA that the unusual, illegal tactics their agency adopted for reasons of expediency are nothing but milder variations of the usual, government-approved tactics of the totalitarian state. Once this is clearly understood by CIA agents and all their fellow citizens, Americans might become more vigilant and successful in defense of their precious liberties.